

Self-Directed Internet- Based Extensive Listening Portfolios

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To successfully learn a language, lots of language input is necessary. However, Japanese university students have limited class hours, in which teachers need to balance many activities, such as communication practice, grammar explanations, and feedback. This paper reports on one teacher's efforts to give students enough input through extensive listening portfolios that were used as homework for 2 semesters. The portfolio utilizes materials widely available on the Internet to primarily focus on extensive listening while giving opportunities for form-focused practice, output, and negotiated interaction. I describe student reactions to the portfolios, teacher observations about the success of the portfolios, subsequent adjustments to the portfolios, and recommendations for further improvements to the portfolios.

学習者のアクションは、言語学習の成功の中心となるが、テストとは、教師やカリキュラム設計者が、学生にやる気を起こさせる為に使用する学習過程で重要なもので、学生が自分の進捗状況を知り、テスト前後の学習を高めるのに役立つものである。それ故、より効果的に実施されたテストでは、学生の学習活動にプラスのウォッシュバック効果をもたらすはずである。テストの過程から最大限の利益を得る為に、課題を実施し採点した後、よりよいフィードバックをする事で、学生はさらに良い学習習慣を生み出し、注意を必要とする分野に努力を集中させる事ができる。この論文は、1学期において8つのスピーキング課題を実施し、質の良い練習課題を数多くこなす事によって、テスト前後の学習者の発達を促しスピーキングプログラムの効果を向上させる為に、教師/研究者がデータを収集した日本のある私立大学のスピーキングプログラムの評価をレポートしたものである。

LEARNING A language takes considerable time and effort. For example, Lyddon (2011) described how the average Japanese university student on matriculation would require 1000 hours of instruction to achieve a level of proficiency that would allow the student to use English to study abroad or for work. This high level of exposure to English is not even possible in a Japanese university course of study (Lyddon, 2012). Teachers must therefore in some way motivate students to carry out additional English studying outside of class.

Ellis (2005) outlined 10 principles of instructed learning that can help guide a selection of study activities. These principles are:

1. Students must learn formulaic chunks of language as well as learning grammatical rules.
2. Students should focus on pragmatic meaning.
3. Students, while primarily focusing on pragmatic meaning, should also attend to accurate forms.



4. Students need to develop implicit knowledge.
5. Learning needs to take into account the natural order of acquisition.
6. Massive amounts of target language input are required.
7. Students need opportunities to output.
8. Students need opportunities to interact.
9. Teachers should attend to students' individual differences, especially in motivation and aptitudes.
10. In order to examine proficiency, free production should be examined.

Item number 6, massive amounts of input, is the key point in learning a language. One of the earliest and most influential proponents of the need for L2 input was Krashen, who put forward the input hypothesis (1982, 1985), in which he proposed that the only prerequisite for successfully learning an L2 was comprehensible input. Despite numerous criticisms of the input hypothesis (see Brown, 2000, for a review), the idea that understandable input is an important part of language learning and L2 acquisition remains highly influential. Ellis (2005) confirmed this when he wrote, "If learners do not receive exposure to the target language they cannot acquire it. In general, the more exposure they receive, the more and the faster they will learn" (p. 15). Ellis went on: "If the only input students receive is in the context of a limited number of weekly lessons based on some course book, they are unlikely to achieve high levels of L2 proficiency" (p. 15).

Given the time constraints that Lyddon (2011) pointed out, it is necessary for teachers to find some way to supply students with large amounts of input outside of the classroom. In the EFL context, where real English interaction is hard to come by, this leaves students with options of reading (e.g., books and Internet articles), watching (e.g., movies or YouTube clips), listening (e.g., CDs and audiobooks) or a combination thereof (e.g., a

newspaper article with associated video from the Internet). How much reading, watching, and listening is enough cannot be answered easily, but it is clear that the amount is massive—for example, for a language learner to be able to read a newspaper, magazine, or novel without the aid of a dictionary they would need to know up to 9000 word families (Waring, 2009). To learn these 9000 words sufficiently well through reading, that student would need to read 30,000,000 words of text (Waring, 2012).

Arguably, students should be spending even more time on listening than on reading input. In terms of language learning, Brown (1987) argued that listening is the foundation skill upon which all other communication skills are developed. Furthermore, the skill of speaking is almost entirely dependent on interlocutors having had enough listening proficiency to interpret each other's oral messages (Yin Mee, 1990). Furthermore, according to Purdy (1997), listening is the most important among the communication skills needed for a successful career. The need for strong listening abilities in education is further underlined by Davis (2000), who found that Australian college students spent 64.7% of their time in oral and aural communication situations while only spending 12.3% of their time reading and 9.8% of their time writing. Additionally, Janusik and Wolvin (cited by Janusik, n.d.) found that the average American university student spent 2.22 hours per day on listening compared to 1.24 hours per day on writing and 0.78 hours per day on the Internet. For my students, who will eventually take content lectures in the English language, and for any students intending to study abroad, the need for listening practice is a particularly relevant problem.

In addition, the nature of spoken language and listening pose multiple challenges for the student that reading does not. Some of the problems when listening are:

1. The speed of input often cannot be controlled (Brown, 2011).

2. Input cannot easily be revisited (Brown, 2011).
3. Input is altered by reductions, blending, elisions, and so on, that are affected by preceding and subsequent sounds—written spelling does not change (Rost, 2002).
4. Input uses less standard grammar and more colloquial language (Brown, 2011).
5. Input is often accompanied by body language / gestures (Brown, 2011).
6. Input can be modified by sounds such as stress and intonation (Rost, 2002).
7. Input can be interfered with by volume, clarity, and background noise (Anderson & Lynch, 1988).
8. Input is subjected to different accents (Ur, 1984).
9. Input will be interfered with by affective factors including interlocutor relationships, environment, and associated stress.
10. Listening is often part of a dynamic whereby the listener is required to give a response (Ur, 1984), thus listeners' focus on input is often complicated by the need to prepare corresponding responses.

Indeed, this difficulty may be reflected in EFL reality. Waring (2010) advised that to carry out extensive listening, Japanese students should use texts two levels lower than their reading ability.

While there is a strong argument for students to focus a significant amount of time on gaining L2 input through listening activities, listening as a skill is undertaught and underresearched (Brown, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2011). Furthermore, listening for gaining L2 input, or extensive listening (EL), is not only underresearched, but also underemployed by language teachers and programs (Waring, 2010). A review of the recent 2011 *First Extensive Reading World Congress* (Extensive Reading

Foundation, 2011) held in Kyoto revealed that only six of the 153 presentations at the conference dealt with EL in any way. At the 2012 *5th Annual Extensive Reading Seminar "Extensive Reading: Research and Practice"* (JALT Extensive Reading SIG, 2012) which also covers EL, no presentations were made on EL.

The Study

Taking into account the four factors—class time is limited, students need lots of language input, listening input is potentially more challenging than reading input, listening as a skill is undertaught and underdeveloped—I decided to create an EL portfolio for my students for homework. The aims of the portfolio were as follows:

1. to promote students exposure to English input, primarily aural, but also through written texts;
2. to develop as many opportunities as possible to take part in activities that align with Ellis's (2010) 10 principles of instructed learning;
3. to have students complete as many activities as possible outside of the classroom and not have the portfolio interfere overly much with class time; and
4. to encourage students to continue to practice listening activities in addition to set homework once courses have ended.

The portfolio was initially used at an international, dual language, private university in Japan with 46 pre-intermediate level (TOEFL scores 400-439) students in two compulsory English classes. Each class met four times a week, and the portfolio was required homework for each class. The following semester, based on my observations and student feedback, the portfolio was used with changes in an elementary-level class that met twice a week.

In order to find suitable materials for the portfolios, I compared multiple websites, and chose <www.elllo.org> (a website with over 2,000 natural conversations) for a number of reasons.

1. *Genre:* I believe that the listening genre that holds the most interest for students wishing to communicate with people from other cultures is conversations, as per Yashima (2002, 2009). Fewer people tend to listen to stories than read them, and newspaper reports are delivered in a different manner than television news reports. Thus, I believed that listening to CDs of graded readers or listening to news websites would be of little interest to the majority of students, outside of those who specifically enjoy those activities. Additionally, in terms of acquiring communicative skills, I believed that conversations hold greater value than other genres. For example, the tone of voice for news reading does not vary as much as voices in a conversation, and the repair, negotiating, and back channeling features of a conversation are not employed in a reading of a graded reader.
2. *Practicality:* The website has a wide range of conversational topics, and all of them are available for free. Additionally, the texts are organized into varying difficulty levels and there is a wide range of lengths of texts, with shorter ones that are more suitable for weaker learners and longer texts for stronger learners. Without a sign-up page, the website is easy to use, and the audio files are accessible from the homepage.
3. *Authenticity:* One problem of many listening texts is that many paralinguistic features are interfered with due to scripting and careful (slow) reading of texts. This is not the case on this website—all texts are recorded from unscripted conversations, with no rehearsal. Thus they provide students with access to naturally produced language. Furthermore, there is a wide range of accents from all around the world.

4. *Usefulness:* While the primary purpose of the portfolio was to engage students in EL input; scripts and quizzes are available for all texts, thus enabling students to carry out further intensive work, including grammar and comprehension practice.

Portfolio 1

Portfolio 1 was used daily with the students four times a week. At the beginning of the semester, they were introduced to the portfolio. They were advised that the aims of the portfolio were to help them get access to enough English to improve all areas of their English knowledge (develop their implicit knowledge). In class, students were directed through the following steps:

1. navigate to the website;
2. choose a topic that they were interested in;
3. predict the potential contents of the listening by writing down questions using prompts—who, how many, what, where, why, how, does he/she, is he/she;
4. listen to the audio file;
5. listen to the audio file a second time and summarize the topic of the text and three key points;
6. copy and print the script, then listen to the text again and read the script at the same time;
7. use the script to find sections of vocabulary or grammar that they did not understand and check the meaning;
8. shadow a portion of the text (one interlocutor's lines from the script) while reading to improve individual word recognition and individual word pronunciation;
9. listen to a selected portion of the audio file and mark word stresses on the printed script; then read, listen, and shadow again to practice word stress;

10. without the script, listen and shadow to improve spoken output speed (fluency), blended sounds, elisions, and reduced sounds;
11. without the script, listen and shadow to improve intonation and sentence-level stress;
12. form small groups and report what they heard back to the group;
13. continue a discussion based on their topics—an example, written on the board, was if they had chosen a topic about shopping, they could ask questions such as “*How often do you go shopping?*” or “*Where do you like to go shopping?*”; and
14. for review and to help make recommendations to others, keep a record of their listening activities and follow-up discussions in a paper portfolio.

Further Instructions

- Steps 1 to 6 were activities that students were expected to complete every night in preparation for the next day’s class.
- Students were advised that they should select one of steps 7-11, or any combination thereof, for further study. Whichever they chose to do they were advised that it was important to maintain consistency—improvement would only be achieved in one area if they repeatedly practiced it.
- For any shadowing activity, students were advised to complete a minimum of three repetitions.
- In class, students would complete steps 12 and 13 whilst I checked the printouts of the scripts for key points (steps 3 and 5) and further study.

This preparation lesson lasted for the whole 95-minute session. For each subsequent lesson until the end of the semester, students were expected to complete one listening activity from the website. As the class was one of over a dozen at the same

level, I was not permitted to adjust the grading scheme for the class, so no grades were assigned for the completion of the activities. The portfolio was designed with the intention of having students fulfill as many of Ellis’s (2005) requirements for instructed learning as possible, as Table 1 details. In addition, in order to promote autonomy and agency, students were directed to choose whichever text file they liked to listen to.

Table 1. Justification for Portfolio Activities

Step of portfolio	Primary intended outcome
4. Basic listening	Input
5. Listening for key points	Input and pragmatic meaning
6. Reading and listening	
7. Vocabulary and grammar checking	Pragmatic and semantic meaning, focus on form, focus on rules
8. Shadow for word recognition and pronunciation	Automized output, focus on form
9. Shadow for word level stress	
10. Shadow for fluency, and connected speech	
11. Shadow for intonation and sentence stress	
12. Report to classmates	Communicative output, negotiation, free production
13. Further discussion	

Data Collection

Student reactions to the portfolio were gathered through a voluntary, anonymous, online, bilingual English-Japanese survey using the website <www.surveymonkey.com>, as well

as through my observations. In the following discussion about communications with students, the portfolio will be referred to as *elllo activities*.

Results for Portfolio 1

Out of 46 students in the two classes, 27 responded to the survey (see Tables in Appendix). The results were mixed in that the majority of students (56%) reported frequently completing the activities (Table A1). Furthermore, the majority of students (55%) would be prepared to continue with the activities if required by a teacher the following semester (Table A5). Additionally, 91 % felt the activities did benefit them (Table A4). Also, optional comments from students revealed that they were able to understand the multifocus benefits of the portfolio. They wrote, for example:

I think Elllo Listening is a good way to study English, because I can get some ability, for example, listening, reading, speaking and vocabulary. I think that is learning benefit.

I think we can get listening for word stress, telling about your topic clearly, speaking English more fluently by shadowing, etc.

However students' comments indicated that their actual practice tended to focus on the value to them of improving their listening skills (listening for topics and key points); other activities were less popular (Table A6). Other negative results were that only 30% of students enjoyed the portfolio (Table A2) and that only 8% of students would complete further listening after the course was completed (Table A3).

Further results were obtained through teacher observations. I checked the students' ongoing completion of the listening activities at the beginning of each class while students were reporting

back the findings of their listening and carrying out a follow-up discussion. This could take up to 15 minutes of class time if students had follow-up questions. Additionally, students would frequently use this time to chat in Japanese rather than study properly. Furthermore, students would use this time to fake completion of activities such as finding word stress that should have been done for homework. It appeared as if many students were only carrying out the activities to show me, without really being engaged in learning. On reflection, a much more structured approach to this stage of the portfolio work, such as having students all complete a review sheet, and a peer question and answer form might have helped ensure that students completed the discussion stage properly.

Portfolio 2

In reaction to the results of Portfolio 1, I concluded that students could recognize the benefits of doing these activities and that students would carry them out if so required. However, contrary to the original intentions, the portfolio took up large amounts of time in the class, students were not fully engaged, and they would not continue with the portfolio after the course ended. Correspondingly, the portfolio was revised and used with 24 students in a 1st-year elementary-level (TOEFL scores below 399) English class, twice a week. The following changes were made to the portfolio:

1. Students were to choose a topic from the lowest level on the homepage.
2. Students were then to practice listening by listening to the audio file, and then practice listening a second time by listening to the audio file again and summarizing the topic of the text, noting three key points.
3. Students were then to email a copy of the script, their discussion questions, and their summary to the teacher.

4. Students were then to carry out further practice of speaking only by shadowing a portion of the text (one interlocutor's lines from the script) while reading the script online. After two more practices, they were to record their voice using the online recording website <vocaroo.com> and then send a copy of the recording to me by email.
5. In class discussion and follow-up was conducted as with Portfolio 1.

Results for Portfolio 2

The same data collection steps were followed a second time. However, as the homework checking process was carried out by email this time, question number 6 concerning the activities the student completed was omitted. Nineteen out of 24 students completed the survey (see Tables in Appendix). Again the results were mixed in that less than half (42%) of the students completed the activities regularly (Table A1) and only 12% said they would continue with the work after the course has finished (Table A3). Furthermore, less than half of the students (47%, Table A4) felt they benefitted from doing the activities. Conversely, the majority of students liked the activities (58%, Table A2) and 70% (Table A5) would be happy to continue with the activities the next semester.

Analysis

Students were exposed to a lot of English throughout the course through the listening portfolios, however they did not engage fully with the follow-up activities such as shadowing, checking vocabulary, or discussions. The second portfolio did not take up as much class time as the original one, as I could check the students' completion of emailed work before or after class. However, this further reduced students' engagement with the materials and, according to students' reports, they were unlikely to continue with the activities after the course finished.

Limitations of the Study

This is a piece of action research with the intention of informing me of the efficacy of this teaching and homework portfolio activity. As such, the only major limitation was that only volunteers answered the surveys. It is possible that the more conscientious and motivated students were the ones who responded to the survey (either to help me or to potentially continue improving their English), while less motivated students were more likely to ignore my request (just as they neglected to do homework). However, given the triangulation of teacher observations and the survey results this should not invalidate the conclusions of this paper.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Portfolios

It is necessary to encourage students to expose themselves to large amounts of English, and in this case the first and second portfolios achieved this end for roughly 50% of the respondents. However, the portfolio described had more specific primary goals—to have students conduct extensive listening activities *in preparation for class* and leave students with motivation to continue extensive listening activities *after the course had finished*. However, the portfolio left students responsible for maintaining their motivation to complete the activities at home while I tried to maintain a distance between the activities and other classroom practices. On reflection, this was an error. Firstly, how can we ask students to complete homework if it is not tied to their classroom activities? Secondly, as both Ellis (2005) and Dörnyei (2001) pointed out, it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate and maintain motivation within the classroom. Furthermore, the portfolio was designed primarily with cognitive concepts of SLA in mind (such as input, output, focus-on-form, and pragmatic meaning), rather than also taking into account affective

needs of students, including motivation and teacher involvement in the students' learning process. With this in mind, I will continue to use the portfolio, but will make some changes.

- All students will listen to the same (teacher chosen) text and answer comprehension questions for homework.
- Students will check their answers in class with a partner.
- Students will read the script and listen to the text in class and then check for unknown vocabulary and grammar. Students will check these with their partners.
- Students will continue a discussion on the topic with teacher directed questions.

Bio Data

Nathan Ducker is an English language instructor at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan. He has been living and teaching in Japan since 2002. His research interests include autonomy, speaking skills and the curriculum, and willingness to communicate. He can be contacted at <ducknath@apu.ac.jp>.

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Appendix

Results of Surveys Administered After the Two Portfolio Trials

Table A1. Frequency of Completing Ello Activities

How often did you complete *ello activities* for homework?

週にどの程度、elloアクティビティを使用しましたか？

Choices	Portfolio 1 (n = 27)	Choices	Portfolio 2 (n = 19)
4 times a week 週に4回	56%	2 times a week 週に2回	42%
2-3 times a week 週に2~3回	41%	once a week 週に1回	12%
once a week or less 週に1回以下	3%	less than once a week 週に1回未満	47%

Table A2. Enjoyment of Ello Activities

Did you enjoy the *ello activities*?

elloアクティビティはどうでしたか？

Choices	Portfolio 1 (n = 27)	Portfolio 2 (n = 19)
Yes, I liked them. 好きでした	30%	58%
Neither liked, nor disliked 好きでも嫌いでもありませんでした	63%	18%
No, I disliked them. 嫌いでした	7%	24%

Table A3. Plans to Continue Ello Activities

Will you continue with *ello activities* in the future, such as during winter vacation?

今後、冬休み中などelloアクティビティを継続して使いますか？

Choices	Portfolio 1 (n = 27)	Portfolio 2 (n = 19)
Definitely yes 使いたいです	8%	12%
Not sure 分からないです	54%	70%
Definitely no 使いたくないです	38%	18%

Table A4. Usefulness of Ello Activities

Do you think ello activities are useful for improving your English ability?

elloアクティビティは、英語力向上に役に立つと思いますか？

Choices	Portfolio 1 (n = 27)	Portfolio 2 (n = 19)
Yes, they are useful. はい、役に立ちます。	55%	47%
They are somewhat useful. 役に立つこともあると思います	41%	29%
They are not useful. 役に立たないと思います	4%	24%

Table A5. Feelings About Continuing Ello Activities

Would you feel positive about doing ello activities again next semester?

次の Semester でも ello アクティビティを使用したいと思いますか？

Choices	Portfolio 1 (n = 27)	Portfolio 2 (n = 19)
Yes, this is a good activity. はい、良いアクティビティだと思います。	55%	70%
Neither positive nor negative どちらとも言えません。	30%	18%
No, I want to do something else. いいえ、他のアクティビティを使用したいです。	15%	12%

Table A6. Properly Done Ello Activities

Which of these activities do you do properly?*

下記アクティビティの中でどれを適切に行っていますか？

Choices	Portfolio 1 (n = 27)	Portfolio 2
Previewing 予習	26%	N/A
Listening for topic and key points トピックやキーポイントについてのリスニング	70%	
Checking unknown vocabulary and grammar 分からない語彙や文法の確認	22%	
Practicing word stress by reading, listening and shadowing リーディング、リスニング、シャドーイングでの単語のアクセント練習	55%	
Shadowing with script for word pronunciation 単語の発音の為に、スクリプトを使用してシャドーイング	33%	
Shadowing without script for fluency, blended sounds 流暢に話せる様、スクリプトを使わずにシャドーイング	11%	
Shadowing without script for sentence stress and intonation 文中の強弱やイントネーションの為に、スクリプトを使わずにシャドーイング	11%	

Choices	Portfolio 1 (n = 27)	Portfolio 2
Reporting back to your classmates クラスメートへトピックやキーポイントなどについて話す	41%	N/A
Continuing a discussion on the topic トピックについてのディスカッションを継続	7%	

Note. *"Properly" was translated as適切.